

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

The Status of the Claims

1-26. (Canceled).

27. (Previously Presented) A method of operating a vehicle brace engagable adjacent a vehicle's rear edge as material handling equipment traverses the rear edge while accessing the vehicle, the method comprising:

continuously exerting an upward biasing force on the vehicle brace by way of a first actuation system, wherein the upward biasing force is greater than the weight of the vehicle brace such that the vehicle brace is continuously biased to a raised position but that the upward biasing force does not substantially influence vertical movement of the vehicle brace when the vehicle brace is being engaged by a vehicle; and

selectively causing, by way of a second actuation system, the vehicle brace to apply a reactive upward force separate from the upward biasing force and adjacent the vehicle's rear edge, wherein the reactive upward force substantially reduces downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge that would result from the applied weight of the material handling equipment in the absence of the reactive upward force.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising limiting the reactive upward force to a predetermined upper limit that is below a value at which the reactive upward force would cause damage to the structure of the vehicle.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, further comprising allowing the brace to yield for a reactive upward force that exceeds the predetermined upper limit.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, wherein the reactive upward force is created by preventing movement of the brace until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, wherein the reactive upward force minimizes downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge by being substantially equal to a downward force resulting from the weight of the material handling equipment until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising increasing the reactive upward force in response to an increase in a rate of descent of the vehicle's rear edge.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32, wherein increasing the reactive upward force is carried out by forcing fluid through a flow restriction.

34. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein causing the vehicle brace to exert a reactive upward force is carried out by applying frictional drag.

35. (Canceled).

36. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising sensing when the vehicle is about to be loaded or unloaded.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising raising a vehicle restraining member to limit horizontal movement of the vehicle.

38-45. (Canceled).

46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising permitting the vehicle brace to be lowered to a preparatory position upon interaction with the vehicle, prior to selectively causing the vehicle brace to apply the reactive upward force.

47. (Canceled).

48. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein the first actuation system comprises a spring and the second actuation system comprises an actuator.

49. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising positioning nonmovably one end of each of the first and second actuation systems.

50. (Previously Presented) A method of operating a vehicle brace engagable adjacent a vehicle's rear edge as material handling equipment traverses the rear edge while accessing the vehicle, the method comprising:

 biasing the vehicle brace to a raised position by continuously exerting on the brace an upward biasing force that exceeds the weight of the vehicle brace;

 permitting the vehicle brace to be pushed down to a preparatory position by horizontal movement of the vehicle as the vehicle moves toward the loading dock and is in engagement with the vehicle brace; and

 selectively causing the vehicle brace to apply a reactive upward force adjacent the vehicle's rear edge, wherein the reactive upward force is to reduce downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge that would result from the applied weight of the material handling equipment in the absence of the reactive upward force.

51. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, further comprising limiting the reactive upward force to a predetermined upper limit that is below a value at which the reactive upward force would cause damage to the structure of the vehicle.

52. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, further comprising allowing the brace to yield for a reactive upward force that exceeds the predetermined upper limit.

53. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, wherein the reactive upward force is created by preventing movement of the brace until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

54. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, wherein the reactive upward force is to reduce downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge by being substantially equal to a downward force resulting from the weight of the material handling equipment until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

55. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, further comprising increasing the reactive upward force in response to an increase in a rate of descent of the vehicle's rear edge.

56. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 55, wherein increasing the reactive upward force comprises forcing fluid through a flow restriction.

57. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, further comprising raising a vehicle restraining member to limit horizontal movement of the vehicle.

58. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, wherein engagement of the vehicle with a sloped guide surface of the vehicle brace during horizontal movement of the vehicle pushes the vehicle brace down to a preparatory position.

59. (Previously Presented) A method of operating a vehicle brace engagable adjacent a vehicle's rear edge as material handling equipment traverses the rear edge while accessing the vehicle, the method comprising:

 biasing, by way of a first actuation system, a support member to a raised position by continuously exerting on the support member an upward biasing force;

 selectively causing, by way of a variable length second actuation system, the support member to exert a reactive upward force against the vehicle's rear edge to appreciably and controllably slow the descent of the vehicle; and

 controlling, by way of a control system, a magnitude of the reactive upward force.

60. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 59, further comprising limiting the reactive upward force to a predetermined upper limit that is below a value at which the reactive upward force would cause damage to the structure of the vehicle.

61. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 60, further comprising allowing the support member to yield for a reactive upward force that exceeds the predetermined upper limit.

62. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 60, wherein the reactive upward force is created by preventing movement of the support member until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

63. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 60, wherein the reactive upward force is to reduce downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge by being substantially equal to a downward force resulting from the weight of the material handling equipment until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

64. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 59, further comprising increasing the reactive upward force in response to an increase in a rate of descent of the vehicle's rear edge.

65. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 59, further comprising raising a vehicle restraining member to limit horizontal movement of the vehicle.